

Thank you, Major, Governor Heineman, Senator Johanns, General Lyons and distinguished guests:

While there is much to say about the mixed emotions of this day marking the beginning of your first deployment as the 623rd - we are all very proud but also sorry to see you leave. What you do for us we will never be able to repay in words. Your sacrifice ensures our security, our capacity to exercise our rights. Your work protects our families and communities, all the while preserving our Republic.

In your roles as members of the Nebraska Army National Guard, you are continuing the storied tradition of the American citizen soldier. We recognize the challenge this commitment places on you, your family, and your careers. Your time from us will be sorely missed, but by the grace of God your return home will be swift and safe.

As soldiers you are equipped to fight, but you are also ready to build. This is the uniqueness of your mission in Afghanistan: To build out the capacity for increasing security, which is essential to long-term stability and diminishing the threat of terrorism and barbarism.

Our first President George Washington said: "When we assumed the Soldier, we did not lay aside the Citizen." America is committed to supporting you, our defenders in the field. We are committed to supporting your families while you are away, and we are committed to supporting you when you return. We honor your sacrifice, and we will support you as you undertake this important and serious mission.

America is proud of you. Nebraska is proud of you. I am proud of you.

Thank you, soldiers. And thank you, families. I very much look forward to our next meeting, when you safely return. God Bless you.